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ABSTRACT

Art has always adapted technological advances to its own uses. In the last 15 years, art has turned to color photocopiers, computers, mimeograph machines, and thermofax copiers. With this in mind, Central Piedmont Community College began offering a course in 1982 called "Art and Technology" which focused on the application of office machines to art. The course used local artists to demonstrate techniques in this field. Techniques used, all of which produced unique results, included: (1) using color copiers and heat-transfer paper to transfer images onto other surfaces; (2) using a process called "frottage" in which a photocopy is soaked in lighter fluid and then rubbed onto another surface; (3) partially dissolving an image in solvents and running it through a lithograph press; (4) transferring images from thermofax paper to cotton fiber paper; (5) transferring images onto fabrics; (6) running a stencil through a mimeograph machine several times using different colors; and (7) using blue-line or diazo copiers in conjunction with photocopiers. Outgrowths of the course included a local exhibit of art by the students and guest artists as well as an exhibition in Morocco. (DC)

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ART AND TECHNOLOGY

A Presentation by Pauline Dove Lamal of Central Piedmont Community College at the League for Innovation Conference, Miami-Dade Community College, September, 1982

In the nineteenth century a group of artists working in France revolutionized the visual arts in the Western world. The artists did this by taking the seemingly simple step of removing themselves from their often dark studios to paint in the open air of the countryside. The resulting canvases contained a new lightness, brilliance and spontaneity. The group became known as the Impressionists. One of the reasons that this new school of painters came into existence is often overlooked...a technological breakthrough: the invention of the humble tube! Tubes of paint suddenly made painting portable. Since the time that caveman first began applying pigments to wall surfaces, art and technology have gone hand in hand. Naturally, in the last fifteen years this combination has turned to the inventions of our own age: color photocopiers, computers, mimeograph and thermofax copiers.

It was in the spirit of keeping pace with twentieth century technology that in the winter of 1982, Central Piedmont Community College began offering an experimental course called "Art and Technology". The course was designed to explore the possibilities of combining the use of office machines with traditional art techniques.

In order to understand the motivations for introducing such a course into the curriculum, it is necessary to look back to the years 1980 and 1981. At that time, Charlotte area artists were becoming more and more aware of a new movement in the visual arts in which the color photocopier was playing an important role. Artists were traveling to Atlanta where it was known that "time" could be purchased on a machine being made available to the public. Simultaneous to this new interest, I had taken on the role of exhibits co-ordinator at the local arts center, Spirit Square. In this role I searched for an exhibition that could be national in scope as well as timely and meaningful to local artists. After reading a book entitled Copy Art, I decided that I would mount a National Xerography Invitational. From the book I found that Sonia Landy Sheridan had in fact started a program at the Art Institute of Chicago called the "Generative Systems Branch" devoted to the exploration of mechanical systems that "generate images". Contacting Ms. Sheridan I was able to do two things: organize the national invitational based on a list of artists she knew who were working with the new media; invite Ms. Sheridan herself to Charlotte to give a two-day workshop.

Perhaps to an administrator with a tight budget, the most interesting aspect of this dual billing of national invitational and workshop is the manner in which it was funded. Community support was widespread: Spirit Square Art Center contributed its gallery and workshop space, personnel support, and some funds; Xerox Corporation allowed the use of its demonstation color copier to produce invitations, and also allowed students enrolled in the workshop the use of this color copier; the Mint Museum of Art, the Charlotte Guild of Artists, Charlotte Art League, and the Light Factory, a photography club, all contributed funds to pay for the workshop; the local Arts and Science Council approved a small grant to bring Ms. Sheridan to Charlotte; Central Piedmont Community College provided personnel, publicity, and the practical means by which students could enroll for the workshop for a fee of $2.50.

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The exhibition and workshop were so successful that it was necessary to turn away would-be participants from both North and South Carolina. It was obvious: people wanted more.

It was for this reason that the following year I organized the course entitled, "Art and Technology". In designing the course, I decided to pool the talents of several area artists whom I knew to be exploring some new technological means of creating images in their own work. Once again I went to the Arts and Science Council for support. The Council awarded Central Piedmont a small grant to offer honoraria to four artists. The artists were asked to demonstrate their own special techniques related to art and technology. Acting as "lead instructor", I organized the course to meet one night per week for eleven weeks-- each artist was allotted two to four sessions each to demonstrate new techniques. I took the first session. Using a color copier provided by the University of North Carolina-Charlotte, the group experimented with images and the various ways in which the Color Xerox 6500 can be manipulated. The artists' fascination for the color copier can be explained by the unique images that the machine produces. Real objects, when placed on the machine, produce images that have a three-dimensional quality unlike that found in a photograph. The heat-transfer paper can be used to transfer the image onto other surfaces, such as T-shirts or cotton-fiber papers. This can be done by simply ironing the photocopy onto another surface. I often used this technique, but also used another means of transferring the images I produced called "frottage". In this case, ordinary (cheaper) paper is used in the machine. Rather than ironing the image onto another surface, the photocopy is soaked in Ronsonol lighter fluid, flipped over face down, and rubbed onto the other surface. The surface can then be re-worked with color pencil, spray enamel paints, or other media.

A similar technique can be found in the demonstrations that Don Byrum, an invited artist, gave to the class. Byrum is a professional printmaker and enjoys exploring the combination of the new technologies with the more traditional means of making prints, such as lithography. This artist will first choose an image made either on a color copier or simply selected from a magazine, and partially dissolve the image by applying strong solvents to certain areas of the picture. Then, rather than using the frottage technique that I used, he will transfer the image from the photocopy or magazine by running it through the lithography press. The resulting transferred image often bears resemblance to landscapes. The artist then manipulates the surface of the new image to enhance the "landscape" quality. This artist also uses the thermofax copier to transfer images first onto the translucent thermofax paper, and then again onto a more stable cotton fiber based paper. In both processes, the initial image is completely transfigured by solvent and process, and merely acts as a starting point for the final design, often worked with color pencil.

A second invited artist, Gilda Syverson, specializes in surface design, and has a strong interest in fabrics. She also uses a technique which has some similarity to the one which I employed in that it uses heat transfer with an iron. Early experiments in color photocopiers were done with colored papers which dyed the image in the machine by heat. Now the machines use a fine synthetic powder that seems to melt onto the paper as the image to be copied is run through the machine. In her earlier workshop, Ms. Sheridan brought these first heat transfer papers to show us. Syverson, attending the workshop, was given some paper by Ms. Sheridan and began to experiment on her own. Since no such paper is currently being made, this artist began looking to other sources for a similar paper. Finding a new source, Fabu art papers, she continued to experiment with the qualities found in the heat transfer paper. Transferring the image in layered strips onto pellon (a synthetic non-woven fiber), this artist creates a rich, subtle combination

of colors. She often enchances her fabrics by applying rhoplex, which gives the surface a waxy sheen, or uses a sewing machine to add stitchery to the design.

A third invited artist, Chris Campbell, employs the humble mimeograph copier in conjunction with the ordinary black and white photocopier. First, a stencil is created from the photocopy or from images drawn onto the stencil. Then the stencil is run through the mimeograph machine not once, but several times in different colors. By changing the colors on the blankets of the mimeograph copier and by slightly off-registering the images as they are printed again and again, new rich color combinations are created. Sometimes Campbell re-creates parts of books, binding them as a bookmaker would, or she takes pinking shears, cuts the printed images and collages them back together in strict geometric patterns. The resulting images are reminiscent of quilts, but contain a certain new look that could only be achieved by using the mimeograph copier.

The fourth invited artist for the Art and Technology course was trained as a civil engineer. Bill Golden demonstrated his method of using the blue line or diazo copier in conjunction with the photocopier. Real objects are photocopied onto a translucent paper which is then used as the image to be run through the blue line copier. Images transferred onto the acetate of the blue line copier can then be reproduced in an infinite edition of "blue prints" or "blue lines". The original translucent photocopy, the acetate, and the final blue print may all be used to create works which, when overlaying image upon similar image, take on a three-dimensional quality. One of the advantages of the blue line copier is that the size of the images can be much greater than those produced on ordinary photocopiers. And, of course, the look of a blue print is very different from that of the photocopier.

The Art and Technology course continued to be taught in the Spring Quarter. This time the course was taught as a part of the regular curriculum and only one instructor taught the course, the mimeograph artist, Chris Campbell. She continued to use the ideas learned in the first quarter, adding new ones of her own. In the Summer Quarter the combined efforts of both groups of students and the invited artists were exhibited at Spirit Square Art Center. The exhibit was simply called Art and Technology. Simultaneously, yet another exhibit was organized by me as an outgrowth of all that I had learned in the preceding two years about the subject of machines and art. I was able to organize an exhibition by fifteen artists from North Carolina to travel in Morocco. Sponsored by the American Embassy and the Moroccan Ministry of Culture, this exhibit entitled "New American Graphics" is being shown at the American Legation in Tangier, the National Gallery in Rabat, and the American Cultural Center in Casablanca. In the catalogue of this exhibition, the following statement is made: "Surely only one country in the world could produce an exhibition of art such as this: the United States. Perhaps only an American mentality could weld art and technology as the young artists represented in this show have done...their works reflect the rich, innovative, liberated trends in American graphics today."

I believe that such a statement could also be applied to the educational systems of the United States, which make the open-ended experimental approach to new courses such as Art and Technology possible. In the future, I hope that further experimentation can continue, for I have in truth only scratched the surface. In the very near future, courses in computer art and video art should expand the existing format. Using technology, the artist can create art on, of, or with almost anything.